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Introduction

This article addresses the question of whether, in the context of student self-funding of higher education courses[1] and the widespread obsession with retention rates by universities in Australia, student 'voice' on assessment is informing the teaching practices of lecturers and the preferences of tertiary education policy makers. Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)[2] is conducted at the end of each semester, and while primarily used to review and improve the quality of teaching, is also used as part of the process to determine academic promotions (Foster, 2015). Another aspect of the use of SET is by way of comparison in 'league tables' between universities' Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), whose marketing campaigns and websites stress the institution's student friendliness and responsiveness to students' needs.[3]

Tertiary education assessment practices are moderated by decisions and factors that are currently poorly understood. What is clear is that 100% assessment by invigilated exams has been abandoned and substituted with a raft of alternatives ranging from multiple choice tests and mini exams to assignments, participation appraisal and group projects. Essentially, students are being offered more ways to pass, resulting in a win-win outcome for both the student and the university, although the shadow of falling standards and reputational damage lurks in the background (Robinson, 2018), compounded by the higher education sector in Australia being dependent on full fee-paying overseas students for its financial viability (ICEF Monitor, 2018). This dependency has been amply demonstrated following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already led to campus closures and job losses in regional universities.

The main contention in this article is that in the current competitive higher education market, the role of assessment is less about aligning assessment with learning outcomes or student autonomy in selecting alternative modes of assessment, and more about: (a) allowing students a self-selection strategy to assessment that maximises their strengths; (b) minimising the collective impact of assessment on student workloads; and (c) facilitating the fastest trajectory to completion of the respective degree. Hence, 'academic success' is broader than the number of graduations and encompasses promotion outcomes for staff and the university's corporate goals.

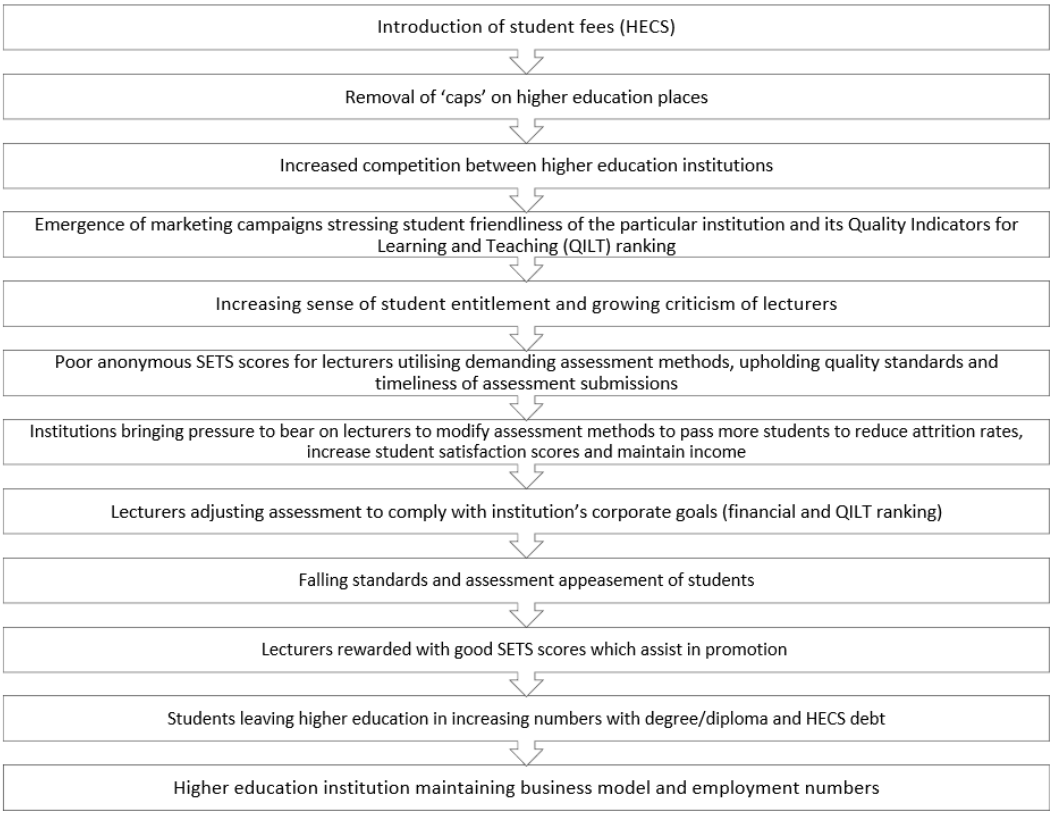
This article argues that three broad categories emerge from the literature on student 'voice' in relation to their tertiary education. By 'voice' we mean assessment methods that are influenced by student choices and perception of assessment. These categories include: (1) Student co-creation in learning and teaching and assessment, (2) Student choice in assessment, and (3) Student perception of assessment. This third category is arguably the most relevant in Australia since it has the greatest influence on SET. Two related issues emerge from the significance of the third category: (1) identifying the uses of SET by students, lecturers and universities; and (2) whether in the future, given the technological advances that can be anticipated in the delivery of tertiary courses and the competition between universities in Australia for the student dollar under the self-funding model, there is likely to be a shift towards greater student choice in the type of assessment offered tailored to the strengths and preferences of students expressed in SET. By way of context, the next section provides a brief overview of the impact of student perception of assessment (measured by SET) and the increased competition between universities (measured by Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT)) on the assessment methods adopted by lecturers. In short, what is the nature of the relationship between student choices/preferences in assessment and the business model for tertiary education in Australia?

Schematic model of changing relationship between lecturers, students and higher education institutions

The days of free universal higher education in Australia are long gone. The passage of the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988* (Cth) set the scene for future developments as to how the Commonwealth would fund higher education and the contributions students would be required to make to their own education. In transferring the cost of tertiary education onto the shoulders of a growing number of students, a sense of consumer driven student entitlement has arisen which has altered the relationship between students and academics (Lippmann, et al., 2009; Burke, et al., 2019), lowered student performance (Bunce, et al., 2016) and can be summed up in the schematic model in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Schematic model of the transfer of costs of higher education on to students



As a direct result of student self-funding of higher education courses in Australia, any analysis of higher education assessment must be undertaken through an economic lens rather than an educational or pedagogical lens. The main point to draw from the above schematic model is that universities have become educational businesses, and as such, have customers in the form of domestic and international students. The inevitable consequence is that the relationship between

lecturers and students is changing as students increasingly exercise their power as the customer with the option to change supplier.[4] Essentially, the model is predicated on there being an inverse relationship between student entitlement and quality indicators,[5] because SET scores are based on assessing student satisfaction rather than on a matrix that measures student learning. The rising power of students as customers of educational businesses and the need to satisfy their expectations (Fullerton, 2013; Schaefer, et al., 2013), leads to a consideration of the impact this changing dynamic will have on assessment.

Students as Consumers and Agents of Change

The current funding arrangements in higher education result in students being self-funders of their tertiary education. This self-funding model places students in a powerful position to bring about institutional change in the way degrees (the products) are delivered and assessed. Scholars in the higher education teaching and learning field (Bovill, et al., 2016) describe students in the new 'marketised' higher educational context as 'consumers'. Therefore, as consumers, students have a new position within this new higher educational paradigm as potential 'agents of change' that can give 'voice' to their perceptions of assessment (Bovill, et al., 2011). 'Student voice' has been depicted as 'a theory and set of practices that positions students as active agents in analyses and revisions of education' (Bovill et al., 2011, p. 134). Listening to what students say, and implementing change in response, brings firmly established teaching and learning beliefs and practices into question (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Research into 'hearing student voice' and involvement in educational design and curricula development, is viewed favourably in the higher education sector (HES) (Brooman, et al., 2015). However, the sector is primarily focused on 'quality assurance' and student retention, with little regard for the direct involvement of students in changing the teaching and learning process (Seale, 2010). A key part of this learning and teaching process is the assessment of student learning (Dawson et al., 2013).

Initiating change to the conceptualisation, development, and practice of student assessment in higher education requires changes to the learning and teaching culture at an institutional, faculty, and lecturer level (Brooman et al., 2015, p. 34). Research into student 'choice' of assessment in Australian higher education courses is limited. However, an opportunity to improve student retention and course engagement may be tied to greater student 'voice' in the type of course assessment offered and its weighting.

Assessment of student learning consumes a large part of university lecturers' workloads and is a major focus of higher education students (Dawson et al., 2013, p. 38). As assessment is so critical to the teaching and learning process, the need to understand what factors influence students' preferences for assessment modes and their bearing on student performance is important to lecturers, faculties, and universities.

As set out in the introduction, this article argues that in the current competitive higher education market, the role of assessment is less about aligning assessment with learning outcomes or student autonomy in selecting alternative modes of assessment, and more about (a) allowing students a self-selection strategy to assessment that maximises their strengths; (b) minimising the collective impact of assessment on student workloads; and (c) facilitating the fastest trajectory to completion of the respective degree.[6] These three developments in assessment are a function of the student becoming

a consumer of educational products. Hence, the emphasis shifts onto students' perceptions of assessment that best suits their strengths, workload and timeline.

The purpose of the next section is to examine the literature on student 'voice' in higher education assessment. The discussion falls under the three categories on student voice noted in the introduction: 1. co-creation in learning, teaching and assessment, which explores the findings of studies related to the collaborative design of assessment at a course and program level; 2. student 'choice' in assessment, which makes inquiry into studies examining the agency provided to students regarding course level assessment choice; and, 3. student perception of assessment, which examines students' shared perceptions of assessment and the impact this has on learning. In the following discussion, the third 'voice' category, student perception of assessment, is the main focus, although there is a degree of overlap with the second heading, student 'choice' in assessment.

Student 'voice' in higher education assessment

1. Co-creation in learning and teaching and assessment

Calls for greater student involvement in curriculum design have a long history stretching back to the early 20th Century with scholars such as Dewey (2007) and Rogers and Freiberg (1994) advocating curriculum design become a shared responsibly between teacher and student. Many authors since Dewey have argued that active student participation (ASP) in the design of curriculum, and more specifically assessment, supports learning by engaging students in authentic and relevant learning, and in addition redefines the traditional power differential between lecturer and student (Freire, 2009; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Bovill et al. (2011, p. 134) acknowledge student voice as a contemporary theory and collection of practices that situates 'students as active agents in analyses and revisions of education'. Positioning students as active learners shifts the power dynamic between student and teacher (Mihans, et al., 2008) allowing students to move away from passivity towards agency (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). Canning (2017) highlights the interchangeable relationship between 'student voice' and 'student engagement'. Canning points out that student engagement and initiatives such as 'students as partners' (Healey, et al., 2014) connect closely to student voice.

For Canning (2017), student voice is multifaceted, and involves incorporating student course feedback via student surveys, both formal and informal, student and teacher partnerships, and co-creation of curriculum including assessment. Bovill, Morss, and Bulley (2009) refer to the frequent use of student feedback on learning and teaching via student surveys, as the dominant form of feedback used to inform the modification of course curriculum. This approach was considered reactionary rather than proactively involving students in course design decisions.

The ASP approach to curriculum design is predicated on an understanding that power is shared between teacher and student and the model of co-creation underpins the process (Bovill et al., 2009). A further co-creation study by Bovill (2014) suggested that students when given new responsibility over the design of their curricula took this responsibility seriously. Bovill (2014) notes that co-creation approaches that use ASP do not eliminate the important contribution made through the expertise of the lecturer, but instead changes the role of the lecturer to that of "facilitator of learning" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

The use of the terms co-creation and student participation is widespread and viewed positively in the literature. However, ASP in curriculum design is not without its share of problems and critics

(Bovill et al., 2009). For instance, Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) identify the threat posed to students who have come from an educational system dominated by the teacher as a negative aspect of ASP approaches to curriculum design. Students from this environment often resist this approach to educational change. Other critics of ASP approaches raise the issue of placing an overinflated value upon the views of students (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Further opponents to the use of co-creation point out that the processes have many constraints. These include limiting factors such as institutional resourcing and time pressures (Bovill, 2014), staff and student discomfort with changing the roles and norms of teaching and learning (Bovill, 2014), and the demands of regulatory frameworks and the need to meet certain professional standards (Bovill et al., 2009).

However, a more fundamental criticism of co-creation in learning and teaching is that the model is dated, utopian and unrealistic for the following reasons:

- Students are time poor.
- Students often have full or part-time employment while studying.
- Students are conscious of minimising HECS costs.
- Many students just want to finish as soon as possible.
- Mature age students with families recognise the risk of dropping out if study is spread out over too many years.
- The co-creation model is divorced from the realities of the ongoing pressures and hardships faced by students.

For example, according to the 2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey (University Australia, p. 12), more than four in five domestic undergraduate students (82%) are in paid employment. Full-time undergraduate students who work do a median of 12 hours per week. Nearly a third (30%) of full-time domestic undergraduate students work more than 20 hours a week and more than 10% work more than 30 hours. The share of students working more than 20 hours has increased steadily since earlier surveys.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the co-creation model, students are using their growing sense of entitlement as the consumer to exert pressure to secure greater choice in the type of assessment offered. Irrespective of whether working with student feedback is viewed as 'reactionary' (Bovill et al., 2009), the power sharing envisaged under the co-creation model has been transformed into lecturers adjusting their assessment to comply with the university's corporate financial and QILT ranking goals, as depicted in the schematic model above of the relationship between lecturers, students and universities.

2. Student 'choice' in assessment

Assessment is an essential part of effective teaching and learning (Boud, 2007; Race, et al., 2005). Race, et al., (2005) argue assessment is more than a method or technique used to measure learning attainment, contending that assessment aligns learning outcomes and evidence-based judgments with appropriate assessment approaches within the broader scope of learning and teaching. Assessment results have consequences for students, therefore good assessment design that is fit for purpose is essential (Garside, et al., 2009).

Boud and Falchikov's (2007) study found numerous instances of learners who desired and sought a degree of autonomy in assessment. They reported that providing students with a degree of choice within the assessment task or assessment mode significantly supports student learning and academic success. Garside et al.'s (2009) empirical study examined the impact of moving away from traditional examination style assessment to a more student-centred approach, which provided students with assessment choice by offering students a self-selection strategy to assessment.

Garside et al. (2009) and Boud and Falchikov's (2007) studies' findings confirm that involving students in taking charge of their learning, by including some degree of choice in assessment, develops learner autonomy and enhances student learning experience. This research suggests the use of student choice of assessment across both program and course level caters for different student learning styles, acknowledges individual student assessment experiences and perceptions, and allows students to work to their strengths and weaknesses, thus improving student success (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Garside et al., 2009; Race et al., 2005).

Clearly, the word 'choice' has a variety of meanings depending on the context. For example, a student may have a 'choice' between several alternative assignment topics, but the assignment may still be compulsory and be worth a fixed percentage of the total marks. A wider student 'choice' would be to allow a student to select an alternative method of assessment to an assignment, meaning that the 'mix' of assessment would differ between students. For a student to work to their strengths and weaknesses, it is necessary for the constituent parts of the assessment regime to be flexible. This may create problems with a level playing field for the purposes of grading students. Outside of core compulsory units, different elective units provide a wide variety of choice of assessment. Students are free to select their elective units based on their own perceived strengths and weaknesses.

In this context, 'choice' relates to students making selections from a menu of assessment options. Student choice blends into student perception of assessment where the university initiates the change in the menu of assessment options based on the university's understanding and accommodation of student perception of assessment. This is driven both by the student as an individual consumer and by other factors such as the 'first year experience' and attrition rates. For example, if in a degree course a majority of first year units have 50% - 60% of the assessment in the form of examinations, the university may seek to lower both the number of units with exams and the percentage of the assessment in the form of examinations. This change occurs because the university considers the attrition rate to be partially influenced by student perception of assessment, which in this example, is that examinations are more stressful and therefore lead to higher attrition rates (Pascoe, et al., 2020).

3. Student perception of assessment

Assessment is not a clinical process devoid of emotion (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Boud and Falchikov (2007) argue that assessing students can have unintended consequences that may have positive or negative emotional interpretations attached to the experience of assessment. Students bring individual experiences and perceptions of assessments modes into the assessment process (Race et al., 2005). Boud and Falchikov (2007, p. 144) suggest students' emotional experiences associated with being assessed are multifaceted and are a "function of the relationship between the expectations and dispositions of the learner, relationships between learners and other people, the judgments made about learners and the ways in which judgments are made".

Garside et al. (2009) highlight the negative aspects of assessment experience such as stress and anxiety encountered in formal examinations and oral presentations having a profound effect and influence on student preference and choice of assessment mode. Likewise, Race et al. (2005) suggest students' strengths, weaknesses and prior experience of assessment are all strong influencing factors of choice. Additionally, Ben-Shakhar and Sinai (1991) argue that gender plays a role in influencing assessment choice and preferences. Their findings suggested female students chose essay style exam assessment methods over multiple-choice exams, in contrast to male students who preferred multiple choice assessment modes that required greater guessing tendencies. While prior experiences, individual strengths and weaknesses, and gender influenced student assessment choice, students also viewed choice of assessment modes as an opportunity to challenge themselves and develop further skills and knowledge (Garside et al., 2009).

In O'Neill's (2011) study focusing on student choice of assessment, students took part in seven case studies, and the findings listed four reasons for making their choices:

1. To better manage their time across program workloads over the semester
2. To choose assessment modes that allowed them to cater to their strengths
3. To give them ownership over their learning experience
4. To provide first year students with the ability to choose an assessment mode they were familiar with and had confidence in their capacity to complete.

The seven assessment choices within the case studies included:

- End of semester prepared essay exam or four problem-based learning assignments completed during the semester.
- End-of-semester essay (100%) or group presentation (50%) and reflective writing assignment (50%).
- Group poster or group oral presentation.
- Continuous assessment or major project work.
- Group presentation or group poster and individual essay or individual audio-visual assignment.
- PowerPoint oral presentation or oral/poster presentation.
- Clinical Practice Report/Reflective Essay or make contributions to a wiki.

Unsurprisingly, notably absent from the above list of choices was an invigilated exam. The reasons given by students for their assessment choices, particularly catering to their strengths and assisting in managing their workload, point to the type of assessment universities will offer in a competitive market and are being recorded in SET surveys. Time poor students will clearly select the assessment options that give them the best chance of securing a good mark and maintaining their grades across units.

Creating our own conceptual model

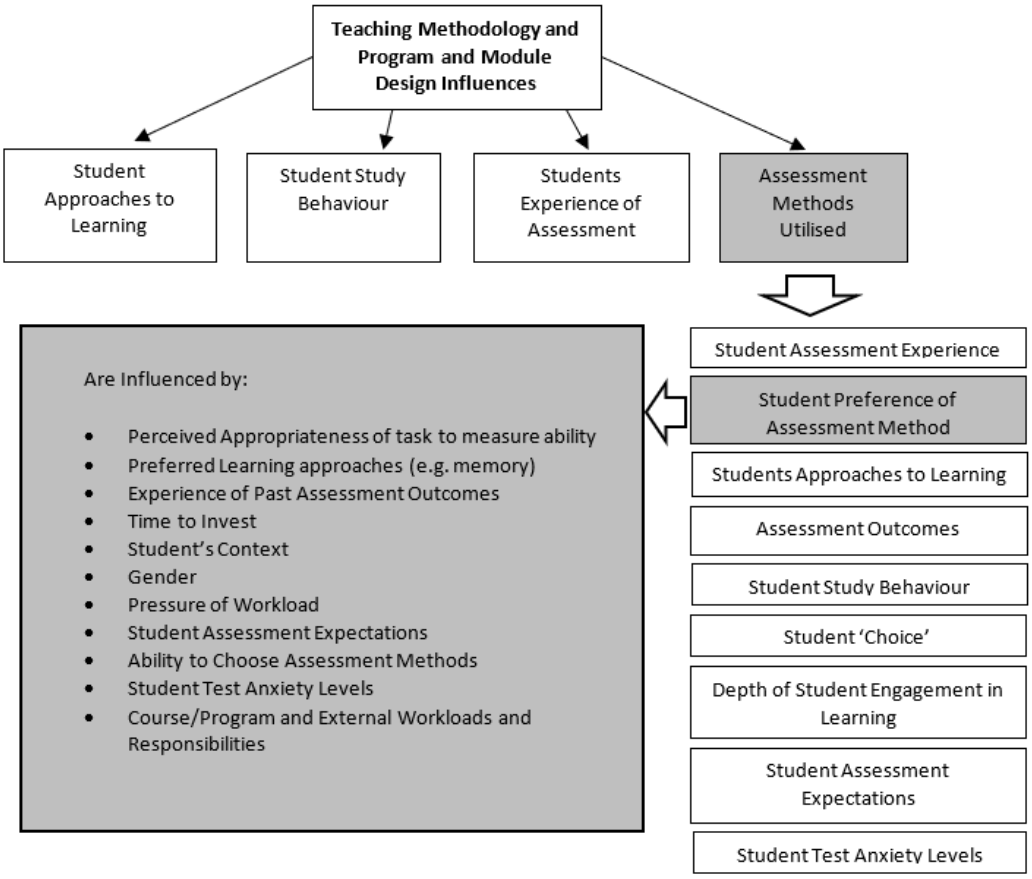
The literature review undertaken in this article has revealed that limited evidence currently exists as to the factors that influence student perception and choice of assessment modes or methods. A synthesis of the literature related to the three identified themes of co-creation in curriculum and assessment design, student choice, and student perception of assessment has highlighted several factors that play a part in influencing student choice of assessment. We propose a conceptual model

illustrating the influences that shape student perception and choice of assessment, shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Importantly, this conceptual model is framed in the context of students self-funding their education, the growing sense of student entitlement, and the emergence of the student as the dominant partner in the student-lecturer relationship. As such, the authors contend other models of assessment in the literature discussed above overlook or underestimate the impact of the student as the consumer of educational products.

Figure 2

Conceptual model of influences on student perception and choice of assessment



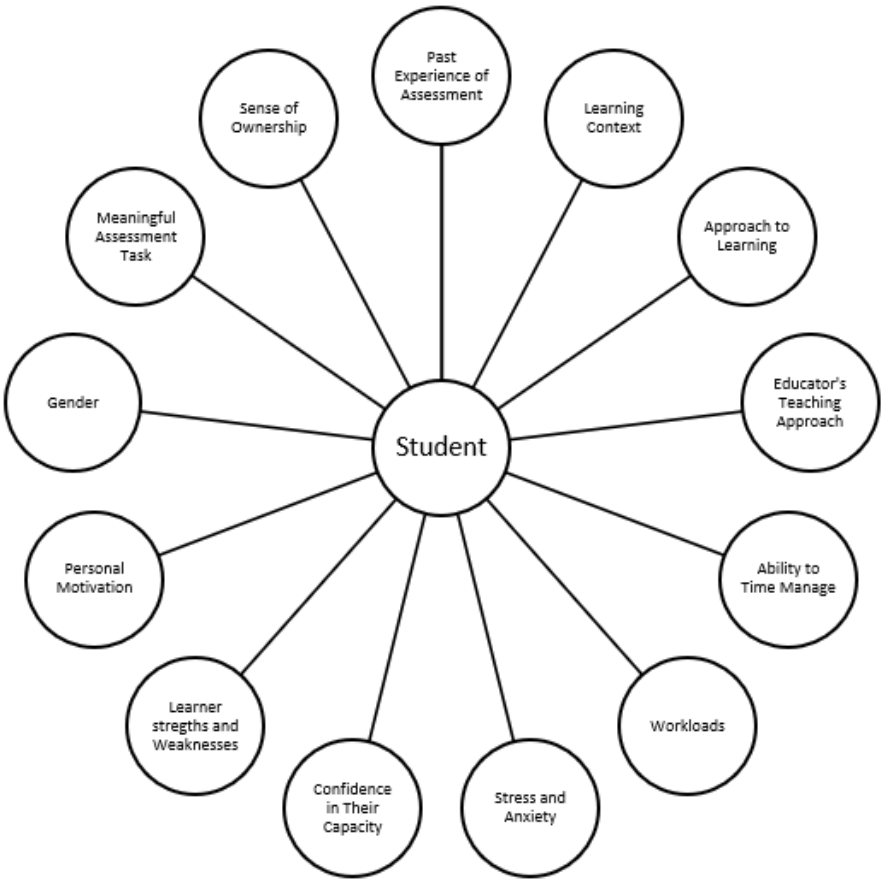
In the Figure 2 model, teaching methodology and program/module design is shown as being influenced by four key factors: student approaches to learning, student study behaviour, student assessment experience, and assessment methods utilised. The next step in the model is to break down the last listed factor, assessment methods utilised, into nine components, ranging from student assessment experience to student exam anxiety levels. The focus of the model is upon the second of these nine components, student preference of assessment method, which is then depicted as being

subject to eleven fields of influence, one of which is ability to choose assessment methods. These fields are developed in Figure 3.

The conceptual model in Figure 3 illustrates the many factors identified in the higher education literature as pertaining to assessment perception and choice. The centre circle highlights the student as the active agent who forms perceptions and preferences to assessment modes and methods. The outer circles that radiate out from the central circle contain the 13 key influences associated with shaping student perception. Importantly, the lines connecting the student to the influences acting upon their perceptions should not be viewed as a static or one-way. Instead, they should be seen as part of an ongoing impact process that is developed over time as the student grows and their learning and understanding of assessment expands. Under this dynamic model, reinforced by university corporate goals, student preferences will feed back into the assessment methods utilised by lecturers. This is the feedback loop between Figure 3 and Figure 2.

Figure 3

Influencing Factors in Students' Perception and Choice of Assessment



In Figure 3, the student is the central figure because, as noted in the introduction, students are now self-funding their education in Australia. The factors that influence students' perception and choice of assessment in Figure 3 feedback into Figure 2 through the top box labelled 'Teaching Methodology and Program and Module Design Influences'. The reason for the power of this student feedback is explained earlier in the schematic model of the relationship between lecturers, students and higher education institutions. The schematic model shows rising student entitlement as altering the relationship between students and academics, such that the student is now the dominant partner in the relationship because universities are obsessed with attrition rates for financial reasons. Thus, the key drivers in the feedback loop between Figure 3 and Figure 2 are SET scores (needed for promotion by the individual lecturer) and QILT rankings (needed by the university to market its teaching credentials).

The authors contend that the assessment literature overlook or understate this student dominance. For example, Boud and Falchikov (2007) considered traditional certification assessment was having a deleterious effect on learning and was not providing a sound basis for learning beyond graduation. Boud and Falchikov sought to look beyond existing assessment practices in considering what assessment might look like if the motivation was encouraging life-long learning. A central feature of this life-long learning was students needing to develop their own repertoire of assessment-related practices that students would be able to utilise when dealing with learning challenges in their working life.

Race et al. (2005) focus on peer and self-assessment, providing advice on the activities that lend themselves to peer assessment and techniques to facilitate students formulating their own assessment criteria. One example given, is providing mark-free rehearsal opportunities, which Race et al. (2005, p. 135) argue "helps students get the hang of what is required of them and also builds in an opportunity for students to get interim feedback at a stage when there is time to bring about improvements." Race et al. (2005) consider peer and self-assessment should be an integral part of learning to engender the development of skills which are consistent with lifelong learning, and consistent with the position taken by Boud and Falchikov (2007, pp. 6-7).

Similarly, the review of a pre-registration nursing curriculum by Garside et al. (2009) was grounded in the recognition that students have individual strengths, weaknesses, learning styles and preferences concerning mode of assessment. Consequently, offering a choice of assessment was proposed as a strategy for inculcating the values of student centeredness and responsibility for learning. Following a student evaluation, the study concluded that offering students a choice of assessment appeared to have been well received.

The authors view the present-day relevance of the conclusions drawn by Boud and Falchikov (2007), Race et al. (2005), and Garside et al. (2009) in the same critical light as models advocating co-creation in learning and teaching and assessment (Dewey, 2007; Rogers & Freiberg (1994)). Students are time poor, working part-time or full time, often with families. While on the one hand students welcome choice *per se*, on the other hand they are influenced by workloads (which include employment and family workloads) and the ability to manage their time, as identified in Figure 2 above.

Students do not have the time to develop their own repertoire of assessment-related practices or the inculcation of the responsibility of learning. Instead, they are focused on passing through university in the fastest time possible while minimising the cost of HECS. Universities have recognised this trend by moving towards a Trimester system, which would allow a student to complete a 24 unit

degree course in just two years and commence earning full time a year earlier. Furthermore, lecturers now produce assessment criteria marking sheets which provide a framework that clarifies assessment requirements and standards of performance for different grades. The purpose of these sheets is to allow students to see what is important and where to focus their learning efforts, thus aiding students to pass. Any life-long learning is predominantly occurring in the workplace where the employee is self-evidently not in a dominant partnership with the employer.

Summary of future impact of student 'voice' on student course choices and assessment menu

The analysis adopted in this article predicts over time that:

1. Students will choose the shortest courses with the lowest HECS debt.
2. Students will select the fastest higher education trajectory to full time employment.
3. Universities will introduce a Trimester system to facilitate faster completion of degrees.
4. Universities will offer the most student friendly assessment possible to reflect the needs of time poor students and the easiest workload balance.
5. Lecturers will accommodate this trend by adjusting assessment methods utilised in order to enhance promotion opportunities and to comply with the respective university's corporate goals.
6. Lecturers will redesign their courses and assessment considering the new consumer driven environment in higher education in order to attract students and improve retention rates.

The economic lens model of higher education propounded in this article, which treats universities as firms in a competitive market, is consistent with the strength of student 'voice' being supplemented in the future with incentives to study at a particular university where 'brand' loyalty will be rewarded. Already free textbooks are being offered for first year courses under the umbrella of 'inclusive access', such as at Western Sydney University. It is a small step for universities to offer a free laptop with course software if the student completes the degree, tapered reductions in HECS cost per unit as the student progresses through the degree, and a capped total cost of the degree. The number and type of incentives offered to students is only limited by the imagination of a university's Marketing Department and the depth of its pockets.

The Commonwealth Government has also intervened in the higher education marketplace through a proposed overhaul of university fees in 2021 to redirect students into priority employment areas. The Commonwealth Education Minister in June 2020 announced that HECS fees for humanities, law and commerce courses would increase while HECS fees for health, teaching, science and other fields considered to be priority employment areas would fall in a bid to 'incentivise' students to study these courses. Whether this strategy will succeed because the availability of long-term, interest free loans shields students from price signals is an open question. However, it is clear such a strategy recognises that higher education is now delivered in a competitive marketplace where the student is a consumer buying a product which is influenced by price.

Conclusion

Universities in Australia have entered into a brave new world of consumer driven higher education (Padro, Kek & Huijser, 2020), where universities are actively pursuing students in the same manner as a firm markets and brands its products to prospective customers. The higher education market could become even more competitive if the current Liberal-National Federal government

successfully revisits full university fee deregulation.[7] In any event, the demand driven policy which operated between the years 2012-2017 has already dramatically changed the higher education landscape.[8]

As Australia begins to follow the United States in transferring the cost of tertiary education onto the shoulders of a growing number of students, both domestic and international, a sense of student entitlement has arisen which has altered the relationship between students and academics.

Research in the United States indicates that there is a greater sense of student entitlement than ever before (Fullerton, 2013). Fullerton (2013, p. 35) has stated that students now see themselves as customers.

> *Students arrive on our campuses expecting to have not only a voice but also a significant degree of control over that college experience (Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, & Reinhardt, 2010). The results of these focus groups seem to support this perspective and suggest that students view themselves as customers who are paying for a consumer product.*

Holdcroft has described American students as the 'Quitter Generation', claiming "they have never learned or valued perseverance because it has been absent from all their pursuits, except, perhaps, video games", going on to suggest that "without a guarantee of success, students either give up or become intimidating" (Holdcroft, 2014, p. 4). This view is supported by Schaefer et al. (2013, p. 89) who in their evaluation of college students' self-entitlement perceptions found that their "results indicated that surveyed students expected and anticipated that they were positioned within the classroom in a dominant customer-business role rather than in a traditional teacher-student role".

At present, there is little comparable research on student entitlement in Australia, but there is no *a priori* reason to believe that the results will be greatly different to those emerging in the United States as Australia increasingly follows the American business model for higher education. Furthermore, students studying at universities in England have been defined as customers by the government since the introduction of student tuition fees (Bunce et al., 2016).

This article has argued that higher education in Australia now must be viewed through an economic lens and that the behavior of universities mimics that of firms in a competitive market. At the same time, the number of courses has proliferated.[9] The implications for academics and the nature of assessment in such a market are profound and wide-ranging. Attrition rates, SET scores, and QILT rankings appear to be overshadowing quality standards. Australia is following the United States down the path of students having a greater sense of entitlement than ever before, positioned in a dominant customer-business role rather than in a traditional teacher-student role. The future impact of student 'voice' on student course choices and the assessment menu is in its infancy, but this article has sought to predict the shape of things to come.

This future is bound up in the vagaries of a post COVID-19 higher education sector. It can be anticipated that universities will be focused on domestic students paying HECS fees rather than on international students whose entry to Australia is uncertain. These domestic students will likely be seeking to transition through university in the shortest possible time frame and at the lowest possible cost, with potentially a strong leaning to the priority employment areas. The pressure on university budgets (especially those universities who relied on a large international student cohort) and the need to maximize revenue through marketing courses to attract students and to maximize student

retention, will place additional pressure on academic staff to accommodate student perceptions and choice of assessment.

Endnotes

1. For 2019, the cost per unit under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) of a law degree at the University of Southern Queensland was $1,369 ($10,958 for a year) and $32,874 (in 2019 dollars) in total for a 24 unit three year degree. These figures are typical of the cost of three year law degrees across Australia under HECS. For 2021, the Commonwealth Government is proposing to increase the HECS cost of law degrees by 28% to $14,500 per annum, as part of the Commonwealth Government's overhaul of university fees to redirect students into priority employment areas.
2. Universities use different acronyms to denote these surveys ranging from Student Evaluation of Course and Teacher (SECAT) and Course and Teaching Evaluation and Improvement (CATEI) to MyOpinion and Pulse Surveys. For the purpose of this article SET will be used to denote such surveys.
3. See, for example, the University of Southern Queensland's website dealing with student support: 'Studying at USQ gives you access to a personal support network including a dedicated team of Student Relationship Officers (SROs). It is for this reason that USQ achieved a five-star rating for Student Support in the 2017 Good Universities guide.' https://www.usq.edu.au/about-usq/why-usq/sro-support
4. The balance in the lecturer-student relationship is further distorted by the fact that universities are increasingly reliant on a casual workforce (Long, 2018), with the ever-present threat of termination of casual and fixed-term lecturers. 'On a full-time-equivalent basis, casual staff are 23% of the university academic workforce. On a headcount basis, casually-employed academics are probably a majority of the academic workforce.' (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2018, p. 37).
5. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency was established under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (Cth). Under s 58(1) of the Act, the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 was introduced as a legislative instrument. These Standards represent the minimum acceptable requirements for the provision of higher education in or from Australia by higher education providers registered under the TEQSA Act 2011.
6. See, e.g., Charles Darwin University website, 'Clever ways to complete your degree sooner'. https://www.cdu.edu.au/launchpad/future-study/clever-ways-complete-your-degree-sooner.
7. In 2016 the Federal Government abandoned its policy of full university fee deregulation in the face of community concerns (Conifer, 2016). When deregulation of university fees was first proposed in 2014, the justification was that deregulation would ensure Australian universities could compete globally by setting their own course fees and choosing which courses they offered (Doyle, 2014). The argument that deregulation of university fees is the only way to ensure Australia is not left behind remains a plausible one as global competition for international students intensifies.
8. In 2012, the Commonwealth adopted a demand driven policy which was designed to allow higher education institutions to adapt more readily to student and labour-market needs, and to move away from a policy whereby the Commonwealth dictated and rationed the supply of tertiary places. However, as Norton has observed, the demand driven policy was a victim of its own success and ended in 2017 due to its cost (Norton, 2019).
9. For example, in 1960 there were six law schools in Australia. By the mid-1970s that number had doubled to 12, and then by the mid-1990s had doubled again to 24 law schools (Weisbrot, 1990). As at 2019, there are 39 law schools in Australia.

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